Guide to the Tradewell Middletown Collection MS 231

Finding aid prepared by Katrina White
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San Diego History Center Document Collection
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Middletown is one of the original historic districts in San Diego. It is 687 acres in size and makes up a long, narrow strip of low hills and tidal flats West of Balboa Park between downtown San Diego and Old Town. This acreage was originally granted to a group of ten investors, including Juan Bandini and Cave Johnson Couts, on May 27, 1850 who paid a total of $3,187 for the land. As Italian immigration into San Diego increased in the late 1800s, an Italian fishing community emerged in the Middletown area. Middletown school was also erected in the district in 1888. The Italian neighborhood was later divided by the construction of the freeway corridor in the mid-twentieth century. Today, Middletown is best known for the historic sites of Mission Brewery Plaza and the Santa Fe Depot, as well as Little Italy and the India Street Art Colony. The district was designated a historic landmark in the late 1980s, and the San Diego mayor declared May 27, 1990 Middletown Founder’s Day. Thelma Tradewell, Chairwoman of the Middletown Property Owners Association at the time, as well as several other local organizations like the Save Our Heritage Organization (SOHO) and Harborview Association, were pivotal in achieving this designation.

Mission Brewery, located in Middletown, was commissioned by the City of San Diego in the early 1900s, and Wilhem Griesser and Son, a Chicago-based Architectural Firm, was hired for its design. Richard Griesser designed the mission revival-style brewery and oversaw its construction in 1912. The brewery officially opened in 1913. In its heyday, it was a social center that offered beer tastings and lunches to community leaders and was constantly promoting their brew. The brewery was unfortunately short-lived, mostly due to the strong Temperance and Prohibition movements whose influence grew substantially in San Diego between 1910 and 1915. Mission Brewery officially closed its doors in 1917. The building was briefly used as an Isolation Hospital during the Influenza Epidemic in 1919. After its purchase by the American Agar Company in 1923, the building served as a seaweed processing plant until 1986. The brewery was soon designated a National Historic Site in July 1989 for its significant link to Prohibition and due to the fact that it was the first mission revival-style brewery built in the country. The building was renovated around that time and designated as an office complex, with the adjacent land being used for a restaurant and underground parking. This site is known today as Mission Brewery Plaza.

Scope and Content
This collection contains documents related to the historic district of Middletown as well as Mission Brewery Plaza. This includes information on the history of Middletown and Mission Brewery, as well as documents regarding the designation of Middletown as a historic district, and Mission Brewery as a historic site. The collection also contains maps of the different neighborhoods encompassed by Middletown, as well as an aerial photo of the district. There are papers pertaining to the early inhabitants of the district; Middletown Founder’s Day on May 27, 1990; and the Dedication of the Mission Brewery as a historic site, which also took place in 1990. Other items of interest include research and information on the preservation of historic buildings, the renovation and remodel of Mission Brewery, and recordings of City Council Meetings regarding Middletown’s historic designation.
Arrangement
The collection is arranged into two series:
Series I: Middletown Historic District
Series II: Mission Brewery
Items within each series are arranged by subject or date.

Subjects and Indexing Terms
Bandini, Juan
Couts, Cave Johnson, 1821-1874
Foote Development Co..
Griesser, Richard
Griesser, Wilhelm
Harborview Association.
Lia, Marie Burke
Lowery, William David
Middletown Property Owners Association.
Mission Brewery.
San Diego (Calif.). City Council.
Save Our Heritage Organisation.
Tradewell, Thelma C.
Breweries
Historic districts -- California
Historic landmarks
Historic preservation
Little Italy (San Diego, Calif.)
Maps
Middletown (San Diego, Calif.)
Mission Hills (San Diego, Calif.)
Old Town (San Diego, Calif.)
Red-light districts
San Diego (Calif.)
Stingaree District (San Diego, Calif.)

Series I: Middletown Historic District

Box-folder 1:1  Middletown historic designation and Founder's Day, 1989 April 10-1990 July 22
   Includes:
   Correspondence between Thelma Tradewell, the Middletown Business Owners Association
   and the City Planning Commission regarding Middletown historic designation
   City of San Diego Proclamation of May 27, 1990 as Middletown Founders’ Day

Box-folder 1:2  City Council meetings (tape recordings), 1989 January 17-November 30
   Scope and Content
   Cassette tapes with recordings of Thelma Tradewell’s remarks on Mission Hills and
   Middletown recognition at several City Council meetings.
Box-folder 1:3  **Historiographies, 1973-1980 and undated**  
Includes:  
“An Historical Overview of Middletown, San Diego, California” by Ray Brandes and Susan Erzinger  
“When the Red Lights Went Out in San Diego: The Little Known Story of San Diego’s ‘Restricted’ District” by Elizabeth C. MacPhail  
“India Street and Beyond: A History of the Italian Community of San Diego 1850-1980” by Canice Gardner Ciruzzi

Box-folder 1:4  **Newspaper articles, 1990 March 26-July 15**  
Maps,  
Includes:  
- Balboa Park; California St.; City Gardens; Chatsworth Blvd.; Columbia St. to State St.; Coronado Island; Hillcrest; Lindbergh Field; Marietta Ave.; Market St.; Mission Hills; Reynard St.; San Diego City College; Union St. to Front St.; University Heights; Wabash Blvd.; Washington St.  
- Map of bay front along California St., April 15, 1869  
- Tourist map of Historic Middletown, undated

Box-folder 1:5  **Aerial photograph, undated**  

Box-folder 1:6  **Miscellanea, 1989-1991**  
Includes:  
“Middletown Historical Society: The History of San Diego, A Brief Bibliography”  
Obituary for Thelma C. Tradewell

Series II: **Mission Brewery**

Box-folder 1:7  **Mission Brewery planning, 1984-1989**  
Includes:  
“Grant of Architectural Façade and Open Space Easement,” 1989

Box-folder 1:8  **Historic designation and signs, 1988 October 31-1990 May 15 and undated**  
Includes:  
- Mission Brewery Historic Preservation Certification application  
- Resolution approving Mission Brewery’s Historical Site Designation  
- National Register of Historic Places Registration form  
- Papers regarding Historic Site Designation Signs

Box-folder 1:9  **Mission Brewery Plaza dedication, 1990 January 10 -February 13**  
Includes:  
Congressman Bill Lowery’s speech for Mission Brewery dedication

Box-folder 1:10  **Articles and manuscripts, 1912 March 17-1988 June 6 and undated**  
**Griesser family papers (some in German), 1901 August 6-1989 May 5**  
Scope and Content  
- Copy of Richard Griesser’s birth certificate (written in German)  
- “The Welcome Island: Story and Laws” by Wilhelm Griesser  
- “Remembrances and Reflections” on his grandfather by Richard Griesser

Box-folder 1:12  **Miscellanea, 1989-1990 and undated**  
Includes:  
Mission Brewery Plaza 1990 Calendar